

IT WAS ALL GOOD

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we read the parsha of B'ha'aloscha, which begins with Aharon the Kohen being commanded to kindle the flames of the Menorah. After many other issues are touched upon, our parsha tells that some of Bnei Yisroel [Children of Israel] began to complain about the manna at the instigation of the Eruv Rav -- the mixed multitude of Egyptians who joined Bnei Yisroel in the Exodus.

Keeping in mind the towering spiritual stature that Bnei Yisroel were on, we must try to understand the complaints that they had. I was always troubled by the following passuk: "And Moshe heard the nation crying l'mish'p'chosav [to/about families]. [11:10]"

What were they crying about? Rashi explains that each of the families got together to cry in order to publicize their complaints about the manna. He then brings another explanation from the Medrash that they were crying about the families. They were crying that different family relations that had been permitted for marriage had now become forbidden once the Torah was given.

At first glance this seems astounding. That is what bothered them to the point of tears?

However, it is easy to criticize others while viewing situations from our perspective. In order to understand others we must be willing to see things from their standpoint.

The shacharis [morning] prayers state: "And His words are living and enduring, faithful and delightful forever and for all eternity. On our fathers, on us and on our children... Upon the earlier (generations-- who received the Torah) and the later ones it is good and enduring forever."

Why are the earlier and later generations stressed in regard to the Torah being good and enduring?

The Siddur HaGr"a explains that each generation had its major obstacle to overcome in accepting Hashem's words.

We understand that for the generation who accepted the Torah it was very easily 'enduring'. They, having seen and heard the word of Hashem, viewed His words with the utmost seriousness. There were no thoughts of slacking off.

What was incredibly difficult for them was to abruptly change their lifestyles. They had to stop eating certain foods that had been permitted until then. No more working on the Sabbath or planting or harvesting on the entire Sabbatical year. However, the most difficult change to accept, the Gr"a writes, had to be the marital restrictions. Many had married close relations and had built families. Now, with the giving of the Torah, these relationships suddenly became forbidden. They needed to

divorce those wives! Their wives of many years standing, the mother of their children, needed to be sent away!

However, as they saw the truth of the Torah before their eyes, they recognized that it was 'good'. Yes, even the 'earlier generation' who received the Torah and had to endure those heartbreaking changes in their lives saw it as good.

The later generations, those who were 'born' into the Torah and its laws and didn't need to make any abrupt changes, perceived very easily that the Torah was 'good'. Their challenge lay in it being an enduring matter and not one that, with the complacency of habit, is treated in a lackadaisical manner.

That is what the prayer is stressing. That both the earlier generations (who received the Torah) and the later ones viewed it as being good and accepted it an enduring way.

With this we can understand that troublesome Rashi that we began with. Most of Bnei Yisroel viewed it as a good thing. However, we can certainly empathize with the tears of those who didn't pass this test.

The key is not getting locked into our own perspectives. I recall reading the account of a journalist who spent some time with an obscure tribe. At a wedding that he attended between a man from a neighboring tribe and a girl from the tribe he was visiting, the hosts, with a real caterer's flourish, lifted a decaying log, revealing the main course--fat, juicy grubs glistening in the moonlight. The journalist couldn't hide the momentary shock and revulsion that crossed his face. One of the guests from the neighboring tribe leaned over to him and whispered in a confidential manner, "I know just how you feel. Our grubs are also much more juicy than these!"

Pirkei Avos [Ethics of the Fathers] is replete with guidance for judges. The question is often asked how do these moral teachings apply to those who aren't judges? In fact, however, we are all in the judging business. We are constantly judging situations, judging ourselves, other people and even Hashem. We must always keep in mind that without knowing all of the factors involved (and we can never truly know all of the factors involved) we really can't judge others. Very often things are not at all what they seem...

There are few things as frustrating as knowing that you are not being believed when you are telling the absolute truth. I had such an experience which frustrates me to this day. My wife and I were asked to take care of the upkeep and rental of a relatives apartment while they were away. On a routine check before new tenants were going to move in we noticed that the VCR was malfunctioning. We contacted the relatives and, as per their instructions, had it fixed.

When the relatives returned, I was asked to tell the 'real' story of what happened with the VCR. Totally clue-less as to what this person was referring to, I repeated what had happened. The person looked at me and said soothingly, "I know the whole story. Your son told me about the hospital." At

this point I was totally confused. "What hospital?" I asked. "How his brother had stuck his hand into the VCR, burned himself and had to go to the hospital," he answered. My denials were met with a knowing glance.

Totally flabbergasted I went home and asked my son exactly what story he had told. He recounted the hospital story to me with absolute certainty. When we started to go over the details of this 'hospital visit' it became clear to him that it had never happened. He, most probably having overheard my wife and I discussing having the VCR fixed, dreamt a very vivid dream of his brother burning his hand. To this day, I'm not sure if that person believes me!

Before we judge we must recognize that we never know the whole situation. The only One that can ever judge is Hashem, who understands every situation that we've ever experienced and how it affected us. May we accept Him and His words as being good and enduring.

Good Shabbos, Yisroel Ciner

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